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ABSTRACT

The needs of American Indian education are many and complex. Basic education needs to be expanded into areas such as gifted and talented, computer education, handicapped education, more diverse vocational programs, adult education, and directed research/dissemination. Efforts should be made to accredit Indian Studies programs, establish a "culturally sensitive site" for education of Indian scholars, and develop programs to maintain the languages and cultures of the tribal people. Federally funded Indian education programs need to move toward service programs rather than pilot projects. There is a need to better coordinate tribal, local, state, and federal funds to meet educational needs. Any future legislation must reiterate the responsibility of the federal government to the Indians. (CMJ)

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INDIAN EDUCATION IN THE 1980's

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The complexities of Indian Education have come about over the past decade because of the U.S. Congress's recognition of the special status of American Indians. This special status is a direct result of treaties signed with the indigenous tribes of this land and the United States. The treaties were based on a government to government relationship; a relationship of equals. Who would have thought that actions by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives with the various tribal leadership would effect their descendents today. Perhaps this paper on Indian education will have a similar effect on Americans both Indian and non-Indian in future years.

Regardless of future legislation which effects American Indian people there must be legislative language which speaks to the Federal responsibility to Indian education. The continuing recognition of the federal government's responsibility to Indian education is essential to protect future generations of tribal people. The legislative language should implicitly cite the treaty relationship between the U.S. and the tribes. Most of the treaties had provisions which specifically called for the federal government to "meet the educational needs of American Indians." A simple declarative statement emphasizing the intent and maintenance of the federal trust responsibility must become a standard preamble to any federal legislation concerning Indian people.

New legislation or amendments to exisiting legislation on Indian education must carry with it provisions to fund the various laws enacted at an adequate level. One of the primary problems with Indian education has been the extension of the promise of exciting, innovative programs by Authorizing Committees of the U.S. Congress and then rather stringent funding of these programs are forwarded by the Appropriations committees. This paradox involving the intent of legislation and the implementation through funding have caused great despair among Indian people throughout the United States. Perhaps a closer relationship should exist between the Authorizing and Appropriation Committees in consultation with tribes to come up with "adequate levels" of funding for new and amended programs.

Over the past 200 years, the various educational efforts applied to American Indians have been aimed at making us like a counterpart of the larger American Society. Little or no consideration has been given to the cultures of the indigenous people of this land. Although there has been a recognition of the "unique" status had not recognized the necessity to preserve the cultures of the tribes. New legislation developed in the 1980's could address this issue. Granted, the arguments that cultural retention is best promulgated by the tribes is well taken; however, many tribes are still groping for the basic essentials of life (food, clothing, health, housing, etc.) and do not have the resources to invest in cultural retertion efforts. The traditional methods of transmitting the culture from elder to younger have been obstructed by programs which separate and diffuse this system. Efforts (funds) must be directed to be construed again as the opportunity for this experience for the welfare of the tribes.

BASICS

Indian Education in American for many years has concentrated on allowing the American Indian to "catch up" with the basic education provided to the rest of America. Federal program after Federal program has been aimed at compensatory education for American Indians, but the problem of this emphasis is that the basic educational programs for all Americans has been found to be lacking. "Why can't Johnny read?" is the question parents throughout American are asking. Why are the various college qualifying/predicting test scores falling? Indian education is caught in the dilemma of aspiring to a basic education that is lacking, and what are the alternatives open to us? I suggest that, in order for Indian people to be able to achieve both in an Indian and non-Indian world, the "basics" provided for them must be suited to meet their goals and objectives as identified by them. These basics may include the capabilities to implement permanent programs which promote tribal self-sufficiency. Additionally, the minimal "basics" standards for Indian education could and should be normed at the median and not the minimum of standards for the average American school system to assure as much as possible a quality education.

NEW DIRECTIONS

As mentioned previously, education for American Indians has focused on compensatory education, attempting to bring the whole of Indian education to a par level with the larger American society. I suggest that this effort continue in addition to expanding to include new areas such as: gifted and talented; computer education; handicapped education; diversity in vocational programs; adult education; and direction research/dissemination.

GIFTED AND TALENTED

If one considers that under the auspices of the Office of Indian Education programs, there are 365,000 eligible participants, if only one percent (1%) were determined to be gifted and talented, this would be a total of 3,650 students. I contend that these student's needs are not currently being met by the "traditional" school systems. Of course, this condition exists for the larger society which has appropriated a paltry $1,000 in Federal money in fiscal year 1980 for gifted and talented programs for the United States in total. I believe that an emphasis on the American Indian gifted and talented could provide the impetus for tribes to develop criteria for identification of Indian gifted and talented; to develop culturally relevant academic programs for those Indian students identified; to implement and expand programs for Indian gifted and talented. Programs for American Indian gifted and talented are not only needed but are necessary for the survival of the American Indian in the future.

COMPUTER EDUCATION

The use of computers has become common place in American society of the past several years. The uses and diversity of computers is

unlimited and when this concept is applied to tribal affairs as Indian education, this tool can be most benficial. The storing and ability to quickly retrieve data on fiscal, physical, human and natural resources could allow a tribe to be effective in managing or administering its affairs. Federal monies could supply the impetus for developing programs to achieve this end.

HANDICAPPED EDUCATION

Serious gaps exist in educational services for Indian youth. This situation is even more critical when applied to handicapped Indian youth. Factors which contribute to this condition include:

Responsiblity for educating Indian students is rarely adequately defined between the state education agency (SEA) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). As a consequence, too often Indian students "slip through the crack" and receive no formal education;

Prevocational and vocational assessment and training programs designed specifically for handicapped Indian youth are non-existent in many states and are rarely successful where such programs do exist;

There is a desperate need to identify vocational training programs for Indian youth, including handicapped Indian youth, in which the uniqueness of Indian cultures and value systems are considered;

Pre-services and in-service training for personnel responsible for the education of Indian youth rarely adequately prepare non-Indian teachers to meet the varied challenges which often confront them.

RESERVATION VERSUS NON-RESERVATION SYSTEMS

Over the past 75 years, there has been a concerted effort by the U.S. Government to move Indian people into the "mainstream" of American urban and rural settings. This places a hardship on those Indian communities in trying to participate in educational programs aimed at Indian people, regardless of where they reside. However, the laws, rules and regulations and policy guidelines are aimed mainly to meet the needs of reservation based Indians. This leaves the urban and rural Indian communities in a difficult situation to attempt to adapt their proposals to fit guidelines that are not a part of their living environment.

I recommend that any new legislation take into consideration the unique status of Indians in urban and rural settings, such as, Oklahoma, California, Alaska and other similar states. The Congress must keep in mind that what is applicable to reservation settings does not apply to all Indians. Who is to say which has the greater educational needs, the reservation Indian or the non-reservation Indian?

RESEARCH IN INDIAN EDUCATION

For years, Indian people have been studied or researched by the academic community: anthropologists, sociologists, economists, educators, etc. For all this studying of us, little has been productive or meaningful in terms of improving the educational, socioeconomic status of American Indians. The areas of curriculum development, teacher-administrator training, the process developed for parental participation in formal and non-formal educational settings, and in applied evaluation techniques. There is a need to identify Indian individuals, training models, funding and to develop cultural sensitive training slides to prepare Indian researchers. Additional system must be established to disseminate and diffuse these and other applicable results of the reserach conducted by Indian researchers. Again, authorization of funds is necessary to conduct and implement this recommendation.

CONCLUSION

The needs of Indian Education are many and complex. Areas such as higher education; accreditation of Indian Studies Programs is a must; the establishment of an Indian oriented University which could be the "culturally sensitive site" for education of Indian scholars. In the area of Bilingual-Bi-Cultural Education efforts must be made to maintain the language and culture of tribal people and when necessary develop processes to teach the language and teach in the language.

As a practical matter, any federally funded Indian education programs need to move toward service programs more than on pilot projects. Additionally, these programs for a more consistent operation need to have guaranteed funding for at least those years with extensive periodic evaluations for continued funding.

There is a need to better coordinate tribal-local-state and federal funds or emphasis for funding to meet the needs of tribal people. With the shrinking value of the dollar and continued inflation, a more coordinated effort must be made by the varioud funding agencies to enable the tribes to make the most of their education dollars.

Above all, any future legislation must reiterate the Federal trust responsibility of the United States Government to the Indian people of this country. The educational efforts must be directed to eventually ensure Indian self-determination and extend/maintain the concept of tribal sovereignty.